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United States Senate

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March 31, 2003

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

I am deeply concerned with USDA's actions in promulgating standards for livestock and meat marketing claims [Doc. No. LS-02-02].

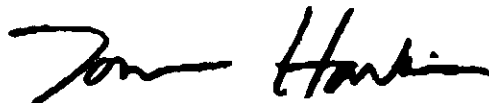
I have learned that USDA largely failed to consult with the actual producers who pioneered the use of these type of standards to capture niche markets. As a result, the proposed definitions in the Federal Register appear not to be feasible and workable for many producers.

If enacted as proposed, I am concerned that the livestock and meat marketing definitions in the rule would be detrimental to many producers in Iowa and around the country, because they do not conform to or reflect practical realities and consumer expectations and understanding. These standards quite likely could undermine the integrity of the labels and consumer confidence in these standards and labeling definitions.

Because USDA failed to seek adequate input from producers currently engaged in this type of agriculture, and therefore the ones most directly affected by the rule, the circumstances require that USDA redraft the rule. At the very least, USDA should reopen the comment period to ensure that interested producers have an opportunity to comment on the proposed rule.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Tom Harkin
Ranking Member